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## President of the European Research Council in Slovenia

On 5 - 7 June 2016, the **Slovenian Business & Research Association (SBRA)**, Brussels and the **National Institute of Chemistry (NIC)**, organized the visit of **Prof. Dr. Jean-Pierre Bourguignon, European Research Council (ERC) President**, and his colleagues from the ERC to Slovenia. The visit coincided with the **70th anniversary of the National Institute of Chemistry**. It also marked the very first time that the president of ERC was in Slovenia; ERC is one of the **most important European scientific institutions**, which annually distributes app. 2 billion Euros (for period 2014-2020 app. 13 billion Euros) for excellence in science and research. The ERC advanced grant scheme targets researchers who have already established themselves as **top independent research leaders; of which Slovenia has three ERC grantees**. Additionally, two Slovenian researchers have also been successful abroad.

On Sunday, 5 June 2016, prior to the conference, the **ERC met with the Minister of Science, Education and Sports Dr. Maja Makovec Brenčič**, alongside **Minister of Finance Dr. Dušan Mramor**; **Minister for Economic Development and Technology Zdravko Počivalšek**; **Minister responsible for Development, Strategic Projects and Cohesion Alenka Smerkolj**; and the director of **Slovenian Research Agency, Prof. Dr. József Györkös**.

On Monday, 6 June 2016, the morning session of the programme consisted of **various activities at the National Institute of Chemistry**, led by **Prof. Dr. Gregor Anderluh**, its director. At 10.00, the **Slovenian Prime Minister Dr. Miro Cerar** welcomed the ERC delegation, participants at the NIC, as well as the ERC grantees. Later, at 12.15 a press conference was moderated by the President of the Management Board of the Slovenian Business & Research Association, Brussels **Prof. Dr. Draško Veselinovič**, and included the guest of honor **Prof. Dr. Jean-Pierre Bourguignon, ERC President**, Minister of Science, Education and Sports **Dr. Maja Makovec Brenčič**, and **Prof. Dr. Gregor Anderluh**, NIC director.

Later in the afternoon, the ERC paid a two hour visit to the **Jožef Stefan Institute**, under the leadership of **Prof. Dr. Jadran Lenarčič**. There the ERC had the opportunity to visit state-of-the-art facilities and laboratories. Slovenian ERC grantees got the opportunity to personally meet the ERC delegation.

Lastly, a final stop was made at the **University of Ljubljana**, kindly hosted by the rector of the university, **Prof. Dr. Ivan Svetlik**. The session included a roundtable discussion on excellence in science, as well as presentations from ERC President; and **Prof. Dr. Eva Kondorosi from ERC** on science problematics of EU-13 in connection with the so-called widening, of which she is an expert of.



Prof. Dr. Jean-Pierre Bourguignon, European Research Council (ERC) President, visited the National Institute of Chemistry, the Jožef Stefan Institute, as well as the University of Ljubljana.

## Editorial



The so-called WIDENING process with its instruments is supposed to transfer (scientific) knowledge, knowhow to less developed EU countries, which we often equalize with EU-13. However, there are European Research Area (ERA) Chair calls within widening which are opened to EU-13, Portugal and Luxembourg plus to 8 non-EU countries. The instrument is helping research institutions to keep and get the top scientists/researchers. Twinning is an EU instrument for institutional cooperation between public administrations of EU Member States and of beneficiary or partner countries with the aim of achieving concrete mandatory operational results through peer to peer activities. It includes instrument pre-accession assistance (IPA) countries still including Croatia plus the so-called European neighborhood policy (ENP) countries. Last but not the least, teaming, as probably the most popular instrument because of relatively a lot of money involved, is helping upgrading existing research centres of excellence and/or also new ones to grow. Teaming results of the last EU call are soon to be released. Slovenia has 2 very interesting projects among them, namely ARTEMIDA with University of Ljubljana (quality (health) ageing) as coordinator and InnoRenew, coordinator University of Primorska from Koper (advanced wood materials). Within health there is quite severe competition while within wood materials only 2 competing projects. In the end, there will be only 9 projects chosen and will be financed out of 31 competing among EU-13 countries which got into this round. For the chosen projects also national governments will have to contribute with their part of financing in order to ensure projects to be successfully completed.

Prof. Dr. Draško Veselinovič  
President, Management Board

## Transport & Logistics Conference 2016

On 3 March 2016, the Slovenian Business & Research Association (SBRA) organized the Transport & Logistics Conference 2016 together with the Ministry of Infrastructure of the Republic of Slovenia and the European Commission's Directorate-General for Mobility and Transport. The high-level event was held at the premises of the Permanent Representation of the Republic of Slovenia to the European Union, and supported by the Embassy of Slovenia to the Kingdom of Belgium. The conference brought together over 100 participants, including EU and national decision makers, members of both EU and national parliaments, SBRA members, experts from international transport organizations, transport attachés from EU Member States, European transport associations, ports and railway companies from Central Europe, representatives from intermodal logistic centers, NGOs, various regional representations to the EU, as well as civil society bodies and academics involved in transport & logistics issues.



The European Commissioner for Mobility and Transport Ms. Violeta Bulc was the keynote speaker, alongside Dr. Peter Gašperšič, the Slovenian Minister of Infrastructure. Presentations were also made from EU and national decision makers, including a host of experts representing some of the industry's leading voices. The event covered the wider EU agenda on transport and logistics, while a special emphasis on the Central European region was given. It comes as the Port of Koper breaks new records in container and car throughput. The port has big development plans including: extending the first pier, installing new ship-lifts and railway tracks, setting up new storage areas and deepening the container shore.

## SBRA Member 24alife Is Empowering the World by Creating Healthier and Happier Workplaces

Approximately a year ago 24alife accepted the challenge to empower each and every individual to get in charge of their own well-being. Thus, the 24alife Team began traveling the world regularly, giving everyone a little push towards a healthier and happier life. Since approximately one third of our lives (and the share is growing) is spent at work, the 24alife Team decided to start right there, in the companies, corporations, institutions, and other organizations. 24alife believes that by making workplaces healthier and happier, we can make a difference in employees' personal lives as well.

To get closer to their goal, 24alife team has created an Anti-Stress Health Package, a program, professionally prepared to engage, guide, and motivate employees to adopt healthy habits and routines that would enhance their personal and professional life. Many pilot projects were successfully accomplished, including with the SBRA team, Municipality of Žalec, and Health Insurance Institute of Slovenia. More still on-going (and also accomplished) 90-day programs are located in Serbia, Dubai, China, and India. By going worldwide, the 24alife team of RC IKTS employees and partners would like to deliver occupational health in a form of preventive health-care and affordable corporative measures. The e-health programs and solutions created by the 24alife team were inspired by the European Health Promotion Program and rely on expertise from Slovenian and Austrian Universities as well as Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota.

For more, please visit: [www.24alife.com](http://www.24alife.com)

## Business Briefs

### **Slovenia rises by six places on the World Competitiveness Scoreboard**



Slovenia rose by six places to rank 43rd spot on the IMD World Competitiveness Scoreboard. The country made the biggest jump in economic effectiveness and productivity, where it rose as many as 14 places. In government efficiency, the country rose by six spots on the back of better public finances and political stability. Slovenia continued to be graded highly on infrastructure, gaining six places in basic infrastructure, ranking 30th in terms of infrastructure overall. Ownership of companies and speed of privatisation is an ongoing issue, as is indebtedness of the corporate sector. In banking, regulation and access to loans all require improvement. Slovenia's main competitive advantages remain a highly educated workforce and reliable infrastructure.

### **Slovenia's economy expands by 2.9% in 2015**

Slovenia's economy expanded by faster-than-expected 2.9% in real terms in 2015 on the back of a 3.3% year-on-year increase in the final quarter. In 2014 Slovenia's economy grew by 3%. Towards the end of the year growth was driven by domestic consumption, which rose 2.1% year-on-year and was propelled by a 3.7% increase in the final quarter.

Household spending rose 1.7% at the annual level, up a percentage point over the year before and the fastest pace since 2008. Government spending inched up 0.7%, the first increase since 2009. Gross capital formation slowed to 4.4% from 5.7% in the year before. Exports, long the

main engine of growth, slowed down to 5.2% from 5.8%, while imports accelerated slightly to 4.4%. Manufacturing is the main driving force of added value with a 5.8% increase, while added value in construction was down 3.3% annually after five consecutive quarters of decline.

### **DRI upravljanje investicij, d.o.o. selected as a consultant for the implementation of core network corridors**

DRI upravljanje investicij, d.o.o. will for its client - the Ministry of Infrastructure of the Republic of Slovenia - perform consulting services for the implementation of core network corridors. In the context of the contract, DRI will prepare expert bases for work programs and regularly update work programs, participate in TEN-T committees, forums and work groups. It will perform an analysis of the state of compliance with the TEN-T standards and the proposal of required projects or activities to achieve them; in accordance with the envisaged future capacity bottlenecks. Proposals for the enforcement of possible exemptions, as provided for in TEN-T Regulation, will be prepared.

Regular updating of expert bases for the work programs is planned as well as harmonisation with stakeholders about the type, content and scope of the foreseen projects by 2030. DRI will also calculate traffic volumes for 2015 and 2030 with a focus on the core corridors running through Slovenia - the Baltic-Adriatic and the Mediterranean, taking into account the necessary projects on the core network to meet TEN-T standards.

### **Slovenia has launched a microcredit scheme for social enterprises**



#### **SLOVENSKI PODJETNIŠKI SKLAD**

The state-owned Slovene Enterprise Fund issued an open call for loans of EUR 1,000 - 25,000 for social enterprises with fewer than 250 employees and an annual turnover below EUR 50 million. EUR 4 million is available under the scheme, with the loans intended to promote business activities focused on the activation of underprivileged and vulnerable groups on the labour market. This is the first time

such companies can quickly access such financial sources. The overarching aim is to promote the sector, which generates 7% of GDP in the EU but only 1% in Slovenia. Similarly, it accounts for 6.5% of jobs in the EU but only 0.7% in Slovenia.

## Research Briefs

### **Strengthening the link between biodiversity data & conservation decision-making processes**



The National Institute of Biology and seven other European partners recently joined the launching event of the BID-REX project, organized by the lead partner Forest Sciences centre of Catalonia in Solsona, Spain. The project BID-REX (From biodiversity data to decisions) started in April 2016 and is funded by European Regional Development Fund within the Interreg Europe programme.

The aim of this five year project is to develop an interactive interregional learning process aimed at facilitating the exchange of approaches, tools and methods that have proven useful for bridging the existing gap between environmental information availability and decisions. More specifically, the work plan is designed to allow a logically planned interregional and local learning process organized around conferences, workshops and more in-depth visits to explore and exchange best practices. Nine partners from seven European regions and six countries cooperate actively. Each of the partners will enhance natural value preservation through improved regional policies using link between relevant biodiversity data and decision-making processes. Experiences in learning processes will be transferred between partners on six interregional thematic workshops. In Slovenia Regulation on Ljubljana Marsh Nature Park was selected as the policy instrument to be analysed and improved.

### **Slovenia must invest more in Research & Development**

According to Deloitte's 2016 Central European Corporate R&D Report, investments by Slovenian companies in research and development in the coming years will remain the same as in 2015. The report showed that 44% of Slovenian companies earmarked between 5% and 10% of their revenue for research and development in 2015. Only 11% earmarked more than 10%; which is below the EU average. More so, Slovenia currently earmarks 2.4% of its gross domestic product for research and development, slightly below the country's strategic goal of 3%.

Investing in research and development is crucial, as it raises added value and bolsters the competitiveness of Slovenian companies. Labor costs should be reduced, as it would help partly prevent brain drain. Currently, Slovenia has enough engineering personnel which can carry out important R&D projects. But the fact is that many are opting to go abroad where they are paid better and have access to better opportunities. Tax breaks for research and development should not be reduced or removed and the regulatory environment needs to be improved.

### **H2020 HORSE – Collaborative research and innovation project**



SBRA member Toolmakers Cluster of Slovenia (TCS) and LENS Living Lab - an international virtual living laboratory - are collaborative partners in the EU Horizon 2020 funded project HORSE. The main goal of the HORSE project is to develop new generation of flexible collaborative robot applications for the needs of manufacturing SMEs. This will be supported by the flexible model of smart factory, involving collaboration with humans, robots, automated guided vehicles (AGVs) and machinery to realize industrial tasks in an efficient manner. New solutions will be tested and introduced by pilot industrial applications in Netherlands, Poland and Spain. The sustainability of further development of this new generation robot applications and its use in the industry will be supported by the network of competence centers supported by the regional innovation hubs. The project will

also include Open calls for application experiments for interested SMEs, which will be published in autumn 2017.

For more, please visit: [www.horse-project.eu](http://www.horse-project.eu)

### **Slovenia to become a member of EU research platform LifeWatch**



LifeWatch is an international research infrastructure conceived as part of ESFRI, the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures. It will merge the system of sea, land and fresh water observation points and provide access to various data bases and calculations in user-supported virtual laboratories. The goal of Slovenia's involvement in the E-Science European Infrastructure for Biodiversity and Ecosystem is long-term research of the processes that are happening in ecosystems. It should allow the country development and usage of the most state-of-the-art research methods. The national consortium of researchers and different experts set up for the purpose will be dubbed LifeWatch-SI.

## Regional Briefs

### **City of Ljubljana dedicated June to energy efficiency**



Ljubljana, which is currently the Green Capital of Europe, dedicated the whole month of June to energy efficiency. Over 50 events related to the topic were held

in the city. The series of events dealing with energy efficiency were overseen by Energetika Ljubljana, the public power utility in the city, and covered a range of everyday themes. On 22 June, Ljubljana hosted a ceremony to declare the Green Capital of Europe for 2018 among bidders 's-Hertogenbosch and Nijmegen from the Netherlands, and Umea from Sweden.

### **Ljubljana the first European capital to get new electric car-sharing model**

The first vehicles arrived on the 1st of July and are available for rental via a mobile application. The project is part of the municipality's efforts to improve the quality of air in the city. The Avant2go car-sharing model aims at reducing harmful emissions - its electric vehicles can save up to 100,000 grammes of carbon dioxide per kilometer. Mayor Zoran Janković believes it is an important step towards saving the planet, which puts Ljubljana on the pedestal of Europe. 50 vehicles will be available for rent in the first year of the car-sharing scheme's introduction.

### **Municipality of Postojna's biggest underground treasure now even richer**



Five months ago a rare salamander species known as an olm - once believed to be baby dragons - laid 60 rare eggs in Slovenia's second-longest cave system, the Postojna Cave. Now the eggs have begun to hatch! They are blind, slow moving animals which can grow to around 30 centimeters long and can live up to 100 years. As the only cave vertebrate in Europe, the olm is very well adapted to its sheltered, subterranean realm: karst caves, created as water eats its way through soluble rocks. If you're heading to or just passing through Slovenia this summer, this would be the perfect time to take in awe of the natural beauty of Postojna Cave and its new hatchlings. The "človeška ribica" - as it is known in Slovenian - literally means a small human fish, because of its light pale skin color.